

05/18/14 5 Easter A

- Earlier this Easter season, we heard how the first Christian community in Jerusalem was of one heart and mind. It can sound pretty idealistic to us who struggle to maintain unity in the Church now.
- However, today's passage in Acts brings us down to earth. Very early on, disputes arose in the young Church. In this case it was an ethnic dispute, between Hebrew (Aramaic) and Greek speakers. Some people felt neglected: sound familiar?
- Solving this dispute led to the commissioning of seven men to attend to this need. The tradition of the Church has regarded this event as the naming of the first seven deacons. They were to take care of those in the community in need of practical help.
- We only hear of two of these seven men later on: Stephen and Phillip. Neither of them seem to be waiting on widows. Stephen became a great preacher and a "lighting rod" who was the first martyr of the Church. Phillip also preached and led people like the Ethiopian eunuch to embrace belief in Jesus Christ.
- All this shows that the young Church adjusted its ministries as new needs arose, and as talents of certain people came to be known. And over the centuries, deacons came to be involved in various ministries, though always with a focus on service to God's people.
- Some decades after this incident in Acts, Peter addressed newly baptized Christians, probably in or near Rome. He reminded them that they were a chosen people, a royal priesthood. They were to carry on Christ's mission in their time. It wasn't just something the leaders of the Church were to do.
- Today the Church needs the commitment of all of us to carry on its mission. The parish cannot function effectively just through the efforts of the pastor and professional staff. We all need to do our part as living stones in God's current household.

-- We understand this, especially in the decades since the Second Vatican Council. But you, as lay people in the world, also must understand that your first call is to witness to Jesus where you are each day: in your families, at work, in community life. We all should be living the life Jesus has shown us.

-- As I hear the first reading, I believe the Lord may be calling some men in our own parish to consider a possible call to the ministry of a deacon. Within a couple years, a new class will form to discern whether that call is for them. I sincerely hope we will have a couple of men in that class.

-- Whether you are called to this or another special ministry in the Church, all of you should reflect, as I should, on how you are called to witness to the gospel message where you find yourselves in life.

-- In all that we do for our parish, family, community and other groups we deal with, we need to keep our focus upon Jesus Christ. He is the way, the truth and the life for all of us.

-- This coming week, representatives of various parish groups are invited to a gathering to reflect on our parish needs and to plan for a parish ministry fair, to be held early this September.

-- May we all pray that there will be a fruitful response to our efforts to enliven our parish life and enhance our ability to be the living stones in God's contemporary household.

-- Most of all, may God help each and every one of us to recommit ourselves to following the way of Jesus more closely. After all, he is our way, our truth and our life.